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ABSTRACT

This document contains three papers on global knowledge transfer issues and human resource development (HRD). "Indigenizing Knowledge Transfer" (Gary N. McLean) explores examples of HRD in which ethnocentric perspectives predominate and argues that, unless a HRD develops a global perspective, efforts to transfer knowledge within academia and corporate HRD settings are nearly certain to fail. "How to Develop Human Resources: Technical Rationality or Social Moral Responsibility? A Comparison of Western and Chinese Human Resource Theory and Practice" (Baiyin Yang, De Zhang) proposes a theoretical framework for cross-cultural study in organizational behavior and uses the framework to compare U.S. and Chinese human resource theory and practice. The study demonstrates that Chinese managerial philosophy is centered on social morality whereas U.S. managerial philosophy is characterized as technical rationality. "Enhancing Commitment and Overcoming the Knowing-Doing Gap: A Case Study at the Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG) in South Africa" (Hilda Martens, Jan Verhagen) reports on a case study during which a social constructionist framework was used to examine the problem of overcoming the knowing-doing gap and increasing commitment in an action research at a South African tertiary educational institution. All three papers include substantial bibliographies. (MN)

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Global Knowledge Transfer Issues

Symposium 12

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February 28 - March 4, 2001

Indigenizing Knowledge Transfer

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Following an exploration of examples within human resource development (HRD) in which ethnocentric perspectives predominate, numerous suggestions, based primarily on the author's observations and experiences, and supported with selected literature, are made for developing a global perspective. Without such a perspective, efforts to transfer knowledge, within both academia and corporate HRD settings, are almost certain to fail.

Keywords: Knowledge Transfer, Indigenous Knowledge, International HRD

THEODOTUS: Caesar, you are a stranger here, and not conversant with our laws. The kings and queens of Egypt may not marry except with their own royal blood. Ptolemy and Cleopatra are born king and consort just as they are born brother and sister.

BRITANNUS (shocked) Caesar: this is not proper.

THEODOTUS (outraged) How!

CAESAR (recovering his self-possession) Pardon him, Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

(George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Act II)

The faculty of the University of Minnesota have defined Human Resource Development (HRD) as "a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance (Swanson, 1995, p. 208). This definition reflects the individualistic and masculine characteristics of the United States consistent with the findings of Hofstede (1991) and is similar to the definitions that have emerged in the U.S. (Weinberger, 1998). Interestingly, though not labeled as U.S. based, all of Weinberger's definitional references were to U.S. literature.

However, in a recent paper, McLean and McLean (2000) explored definitions in a world-wide context and found that there were many variants to this definition. Definitions varied according to historical, economic, cultural, and political contexts. For example, human resource development is not differentiated from human resources in France (Hillion & McLean, 1997) or the People's Republic of China (Yan & McLean, 1998). The recent economic crises in Asia have thrust HRD into a national role in countries such as the Republic of Korea (Kwon, personal correspondence, Sept. 29, 1998) and Thailand (Virakul, Personal correspondence, June 19, 1998). HRD in Thailand also has a strong emphasis on community development (Na Chiangmai, 1998). Emerging market economies, such as in Russia (Ardishvili, 1998), and religion, as in India (Rao, 1996), also influence a country's perceptions of HRD. McLean and McLean's (2000) review also identified several definitions that appeared to be very similar to those found in the U.S. and concluded that there were three possible explanations for this:

- By far the most extensive literature on HRD that has been identified in this research is out of the US and the UK, with India emerging as having an extensive literature, though it is not yet readily available or recognized outside of Asia. This problem was illustrated in the writing of this paper. One of the reviewers, presumably from the UK, provided what appeared to be an excellent set of resources, with suggestions that they be incorporated into the paper. Only one of the references, however, was available to the author in the time available to do a revision. And many of those resources were in English, but were published in the UK and in the Netherlands.
- The predominance of US-based or modified definitions may, in addition to the predominance of the literature, be explained by the fact that many international students are being educated about HRD in the US. This exposure to US definitions has influenced how HRD is viewed in other countries. This process is not dissimilar to the emergence of US popular culture around the world.
- Professional organizations also seem to play an important role in the predominant influence of certain cultures. For example, the McLagan and Suhadolnik (1989) study, which has been so influential, was

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funded and disseminated by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). Much of the English language scholarly literature in HRD is sponsored by US and UK professional organizations (e.g., Academy of Human Resource Development, Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, International Society for Performance Improvement, The Organization Development Institute, University Forum for HRD), while the Academy of Human Resource Development (India) is emerging as a significant source of literature in India.

Purpose of the Paper

Each of these explanations has to do with knowledge transfer. The transfer, however, did not take into account the culture or context of the receiving country, but, rather, definitions emerged that were appropriate for a dominant culture. The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore the content and the process for knowledge transfer that takes into account the context of the receiving culture. It may also be possible to create knowledge that incorporates components from many cultures as knowledge is transferred in a mutual context, rather than in a one-way transfer.

In the above instance, for example, McLean and McLean (2000) proposed a definition for HRD that might be acceptable across several cultures:

Human Resource Development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long-term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity.

Attempts to find one approach to fit all must be made with caution. Here are two examples from the HRD field. A client requested my assistance in helping to implement world-wide an individual employee incentive program for making process improvement suggestions. In spite of my caution that many cultures were team or group oriented rather than individually oriented, the client moved forward with the program unmodified. When the program was implemented in Thailand, near disaster occurred as the workers refused to participate unless the team were rewarded instead of the individual. And what was perhaps even more egregious was that the rewards made available for making suggestions that improved productivity considerably were very unequal, ranging from a truck in the U.S., as the top reward, to a jacket as the top reward in Mexico. In another obvious example, a major multinational corporation decided that it would become global by requiring that all of their facilities, regardless of country, use the same accounting package, without regard to the country's currency, labor laws, accounting practices, and so forth. Obviously, the project was doomed to failure.

While the field of HRD (and education) will probably always have to live with a certain degree of ambiguity (Mankin, in press; McLean, 2000), this definition does incorporate many of the components of definitions found across the global contexts.

Nature of the Problem

In the broader economic and business contexts, there has been much debate regarding the applicability of Western management theory and practices to the economic progress of developing countries. Both transnational corporations and non-government organizations often make the ethnocentric assumption that what works in the West is best for management throughout the world. Yet O'Toole (1985, p. 54) correctly observed that "there is no 'right way' to manage all companies at all times."

Many management principles and theories that have emerged from practices found, and studies conducted, primarily in the United States, or, certainly, in developed economies, find themselves being applied in developing economies with little to no modification. Historically, management theory and practices in developing countries have been heavily influenced by developed countries--the textbooks used, much of the research conducted, the instructional support materials used, and the training of many of their faculty. Yet O'Toole (1985, p. 17) observed that a corporation's needs are defined, at least in part, by "the society of which it is a part." So, too, should the education of managers reflect the society in which they are to operate. That suggests, therefore, that it may not be possible to take a set of principles developed in one cultural setting (e.g., the United States) and transfer it wholesale to another cultural setting (e.g., Bangladesh).

Forti (1981) underscored the problem:

Few single approaches could be applied internationally with any hope of success, both because the nature of man's (sic.) basic needs is perceived differently in different countries and because the solutions appropriate to one country would be unsuitable in another with a different sociocultural and ecological setting. (p. 2)

Laurent (1986) conducted a study of participants drawn from managers participating in executive development programs at INSEAD, who were from a wide variety of companies and countries. According to the study, the largest indicator of management assumptions was nationality, which had three times more influence than any other characteristic. Laurent concluded that Management (with a capital M) does not exist and that organizations should not ignore societal and cultural contexts.

This conclusion is consistent with that drawn by Trompenaars (1994):

Rather than there being one best way of organizing, there are several ways, some very much more culturally appropriate and effective than others, but all of them giving international managers additional options in their repertoires if they are willing and able to clarify the reactions of foreign cultures. (p. 21)

Many developing countries are struggling to develop an indigenous understanding of management for their own cultural environment. In India, for example, Chakraborty wrote several articles (e.g., 1986) and texts (e.g., 1985) underscoring the impact that Yoga and the Vendantic tradition should have on Indian management theory. Sheth (1986) wrote that there are two schools of thought among Indian management scholars:

(1) those who regard western models...as relevant to all countries, although they recognize the need for minor cultural adaptations, and (2) those who have significant doubts about the applicability of the western concepts and models to the Indian environment and, therefore, are in search of alternative approaches relevant to the socioeconomic and cultural spectrum of contemporary India. Scholars in the second category are likely to be aware of the Indian philosophical and spiritual traditions and believe that these traditions contain models of effective living and working in modern India. (p. 108)

Some Possible Solutions

What is called for is a process of knowledge transfer that honors the culture to which the knowledge is being transferred. This brings *indigenization* into play. According to the dictionary, indigenization refers to making a process "innate or inherent" as it "exists...naturally in a region or country" (Neufeldt & Guralnik, 1988, p. 687).

Although not much research is found regarding the importance of indigenized materials for knowledge transfer, it certainly appears that one solution to knowledge transfer is to develop materials that are consistent with the culture to which they are being transferred. During a major World Bank project in Bangladesh, the Business Management Education and Training Project, it was found that instruction in the three major universities' faculties of commerce (Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Chittagong), the Institute of Business Administration, and the Bangladesh Management Development Centre, were based on theories learned by faculty in the U.S., U.K., and Australia, or Russia. The textbooks used were primarily from the U.S., even though many of the students could not read English, and the economy in Bangladesh at that time was a controlled economy, with most industry nationalized. As a result of the project, five indigenous textbooks were developed, three books of case studies and two books of research were published (in English and Bengali) for use in the country's management development activities (McLean, 1986). In addition to the content of the materials, such materials should also be sensitive to the country's language, cultural norms, political and economic systems, and so on.

Attention must also be given to the level of technology required. There are many stories of U.S. based organizations developing sophisticated web-based materials that cannot be accessed or downloaded in other countries. For example, fire walls are widely used in Saudi Arabia to prohibit the importation of information that is considered undesirable. Therefore, web-based threaded discussions, a very useful tool for knowledge transfer among many participants, cannot be used. However, creative use of e-mail can overcome this deficiency and, while slightly less effective, can still be useful for sharing in widespread dialogue.

Another major factor in the indigenization of knowledge transfer is extensive knowledge of cultures, and the specific culture to which the knowledge is to be transferred, on the part of the transferor. The last time I counted, we have students majoring in HRD at the University of Minnesota from 36 countries. That means, then, that HRD faculty must be widely traveled and knowledgeable of many cultures if they are to include appropriate modifications and observations during class. With such attentiveness, not only will students be better prepared to modify knowledge appropriately for their home culture, but all students will become more sensitized to all cultures, and faculty may well learn about theories and concepts that could be appropriate, with modification, in cultures other than those from which they emerged..

As Latimer (1999) said, "Transferring knowledge is particularly challenging when it involves bridging differences in instructional and learning styles from one culture to another" (p. 50). Knowledge of multiple cultures will enable faculty to honor both learning and cultural styles. Faculty will understand the reluctance of students from Korea to participate in heated discussion or call the faculty member by his or her first name. Faculty will appreciate the difficulty some students have in providing feedback to peers or to the faculty member. They will understand

why some students prefer lecture while others prefer interactive and experiential activities. By modeling cultural sensitivity and by presenting material in the way in which it is most easily received, it is probable that the knowledge will be transferred more effectively and in a way that is more applicable for the student and for the student's context.

Another responsibility that we have as university faculty is to help people understand their own culture. I have found that this is often not the case. In a USAID project in Poland (McLean & Schaeffer, 1992), participants in a marketing workshop often expressed negative comments about Polish products. As a means of teaching participants how to use blind taste tests in marketing research, I set up a number of tests using Polish products for which negative comments had been made with the parallel products from countries they looked to for excellence. So we tested Polish cola against Coca-Cola, Polish butter against Danish butter, Polish chocolate against Belgian chocolate, and so on. To the great surprise and pride of the workshop participants, they actually chose the Polish product over the foreign product over half the time. They learned something about their own culture in the process. And they also learned that "the other" isn't always the best.

Another way in which faculty can assist in the indigenization process is through mentoring in research projects. I have found that most of my international students are highly motivated to find out more about how HRD impacts their country. It has been relatively easy to encourage students to partner with me in conducting research in their home country, and I almost always give them first author status as a way of encouraging them to continue to do their research. You will see several of these in the reference list of this paper. Most of these students are continuing an active research life, and I find myself continuing to do international research in partnership with these former students who are now colleagues.

Indigenization can also occur by interesting others in doing research in a different cultural context. Each year, the HRD program leads a class on an international field trip. Each student in the course selects an aspect of HRD that he or she would like to know more about in that context. This year, our trip was to Thailand. Invariably, students learn a great deal about the theory and practice of HRD in that country, and often this information is even "new" to those in that country. From this year's trip, at least four students have been able to develop their papers and will be presenting them in Costa Rica at the annual conference of the International Management Development Association (Brown, 2000; Kowske, 2000; Lundblad, 2000; McLean, L. D., 2000). There is a good possibility that they will also be published in refereed journals. Not only will this forward our knowledge and understanding about Costa Rica, but it will also expand these students' understanding of international HRD issues.

Another way of partnering in the knowledge transfer process to insure the emergence of indigenous theory and practice is to learn to ask rather than assume. In 1997, I was asked to work with the Personnel Center of Liaoning Province, Shenyang, People's Republic of China. If I had operated on my understanding of how personnel functions exist in the United States, I would have made many errors, and my recommendations for modernizing their procedures would have been totally useless. By asking questions and understanding as best I could how the Center operated within the PRC context, I was able to make much better contributions than if I had simply transferred "best practices" from the U.S. context, which is what had actually been requested.

As stated in the Problem Statement section, ambiguity is a factor of life that must be accepted and, I have suggested often, celebrated. As a citizen of both Canada and the U.S., I appreciate the ambiguity that comes from striving to be a world citizen. The greater the comfort the knowledge transferor has with ambiguity, the less likely that person is to insist on a one right way approach and the more likely to affirm multiple cultures and the need for indigenization. As Tillich (1963) stated, "Life at every moment is ambiguous" (p. 32). Thus, selecting individuals to do the knowledge transfer who are comfortable with ambiguity will support the indigenization of knowledge transfer.

Latimer (1999) discovered that "knowledge transfer works best when the recipient is the driver of the transfer, and the sender's role is that of supporter, coach, and supplier of key resources" (p. 51). Any attempt to impose transfer is likely to meet with failure. A widely used approach to encouraging participation in training is through a train-the-trainer approach, so that the trainers are from the same cultural background as those receiving the knowledge (Sullivan, 1995).

Finally, knowledge transfer is most likely to be indigenous when the exchange is mutual. When the transfer is seen as one way only, it is less likely that attention will be paid to making the material indigenous. For the exchange to be mutual, conversation and dialogue must take place, encouraging broad understanding of the needs of each party. An on-the-job or in-country approach is most likely to encourage this mutuality, if both parties are committed to it. I learn much more about a culture when I am immersed in it, for example, than I do simply by reading about it.

Conclusion

As Swanson (1990) rightly observed, "The global economy does not allow cultural differences to justify poor performances...[nor does it] allow managers to profit as easily from their own below-average performances" (p. 106). Much more research is needed in this area of indigenizing knowledge transfer. The focus of this paper has been on cross-cultural HRD. Many questions remain to be answered. Which management philosophies or training methods are most effective, why are they effective, and where are they effective? Which elements of cultural differences ought to be the greatest concern? Even without answers to these questions, it is clear that, if developing countries hope to compete in global markets, or even in their own markets, they will need an indigenous management theory and subsequent practices in order to meet the demands of their business environment. Further, as university faculty, we have obligations and responsibilities to insure, so far as possible, that the knowledge that we transfer into our cultures will meet the needs of the cultures represented among our stakeholder groups, whether students, other professionals, or clients.

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How to Develop Human Resources: Technical Rationality or Social Moral Responsibility? A Comparison of Western and Chinese Human Resource Theory and Practice

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This paper proposes a theoretical framework of cross-culture study in organizational behavior. The framework is then used to compare American and Chinese human resource theory and practice. Chinese managerial philosophy is featured as being centered on social morality, while American managerial philosophy is characterized as technical rationality. Traditional Chinese human resource practice is ruled by human beings while American human resource practice tends to be ruled by law.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Study, Human Resource Theory, China

This paper proposes a theoretical framework of cross-culture study in organizational behavior. It compares Eastern and Western human resource (HR) theory and practice and the impact of cultural and social variables. China and the United States are selected to be representatives of the Eastern and Western world. The examples of cultural and social differences are drawn from these two countries. HR activities are part of organizational behavior, and cross-cultural comparison of organizational behavior has gained more attention during globalization process. Lytle, Brett, Barsness, Tinsley and Janssens (1995) maintain that the process of globalization has presented a strong need of cross-cultural research in organizational behavior.

In the field of human resource development, there is a keen need for cross-cultural and cross-national comparative research because of increasing awareness of globalization. The rapidly increasing globalization of business calls for more studies on international human resource management and development (Brewster, Tregaskis, Hegewich, & Mayne, 1996; Kuchinke, 1999; Maznevski, & DiStefano, 2000; Peterson, 1997). The cultural and managerial differences between the East and West have been studied extensively, mostly in the areas of culture and values. Similarly, the vast amount of literature describing or analyzing Eastern and Western styles of management usually have aimed at the general management domain. There is a paucity of literature examining Chinese and American human resource theories and practices in relation to cultural and social contexts.

Theoretical Framework

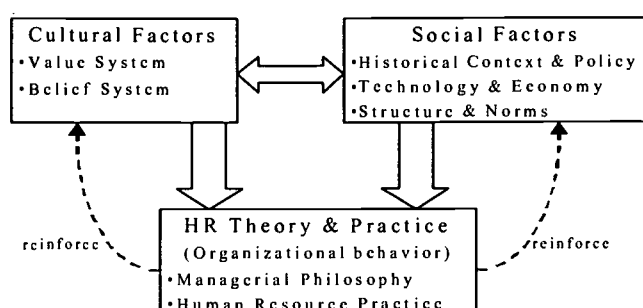
As a step toward the synthesis of cultural and social differences across countries and the implications for organization theory and practice, we propose a theoretical framework as presented in Figure 1. This framework is established on existing conceptual models of cross-cultural research in organizational behavior (Earley, 1997; Lytle et al., 1995). It is posited that HR theory and practice is part of organization theory and practice. It suggests that cultural and social variables are in the dynamic relationship and they have direct impacts on HR theory and practice. On one hand, HR theory and practice is part of broadly defined organizational behavior. Cultural orientations and social variables determine organizational behaviors in general and HR practice in particular. We view HR theory as part of managerial philosophy and HR practice as part of organizational behavior. On the other hand, organizational behavior has a reinforcement function that perpetuates its contexts such as cultural and social structures.

Culture is one of the key concepts to understand international or cross-cultural human resource study (Kuchinke, 1999a; Maznevski, & DiStefano, 2000). Culture has been normally conceptualized as a complex set of norms, values, assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that are characteristics of a particular group (Lytle et al., 1995). Triandis (1993) maintains that culture is the group's strategy for survival and it constitutes the successful attempt to adapt to the external environment. It is generally accepted that culture represents the "software of mind" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 3) rather than hardware. For the purpose of consistency, we define *culture as a complex system of beliefs, values and social norms shared by a group of individuals.*

As there are many ways to define culture, cultural dimensions or aspects have been conceptualized in

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various forms and terms. We posit that there are three basic components of culture: values, beliefs and social norms. *A value system is a set of explicit or implicit conceptions of the desirable or preferable ends shared by a group of people. A belief system consists of explicit conceptions that have been viewed as true representation of reality. Social norm is habit or behavior of individuals or groups implicitly existing in their daily lives.* The value



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Figure 1. A Theoretical Framework of Cross-Cultural Study of Organizational Behavior

component reflects what is important for an individual or group of individuals, and thus it determines good from bad, right from wrong. The belief component indicates what is true among human beings' conceptions and distinguishes true from false. The social norm consists of unspoken conceptions about doing in daily practice.

Our conceptualization of culture implies dynamic relationships among three major components. The three components of culture, value, belief, and social norm, correspond to three knowledge facets in a holistic theory (Yang, 1999). Culture is a unique aspect of group or social knowledge. Consequently, the value system reflects critical facets of knowledge, the belief system is explicit or technical facet knowledge and the norm system is implicit or practical knowledge. Yang also outlines the interactive patterns among three knowledge facets. These interactive patterns seem to be applicable for the dynamic relationships among three cultural components. Take the value system as an example. A value is a conception of something preferable by a person or a group. At the nation or country level, a value is something socially preferable or desirable. On one hand, individuals can learn a value through the belief system (what is believed to be true) or social norm system (what is actually happening). The learned value then is integrated into the value system, resulting in either a consistent integration (simply knowledge accumulation) or inconsistency (which may bring a transformative learning). On the other hand, values and value systems are relatively stable and tend to influence the other two sub-systems of culture. The value system is critical in guiding action (within the social norm system) and in regulating human beings' technical knowledge (within the belief system).

Comparison of Cultural and Social Factors

Cultural Differences

There are many approaches to define cultural dimensions and to study cultural differences. For example, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) suggest six cultural orientations. Hofstede (1980) suggested four dimensions underlying organizational behavior. Table 1 summarizes the comparison of the American and Chinese cultures in value and belief systems.

Value System. Five major dimensions within the value system are interrelated factors that influence individual and organizational behaviors. The first dimension is human beings' relation with the natural world. The Western culture seems to place value on mastery, while the Eastern culture emphasizes harmony. Traditionally, Chinese view harmony as the ultimate goal of human kind (i.e., "Tian Ren He Yi," or "The great harmony between human and the nature.")

The second dimension within the value system is the relationship among people. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) point out three orientations along this dimension: individual, collective and hierarchical. The individual orientation maintains that our main responsibility is to and for ourselves and immediate families. American culture is characterized by individualism while Chinese culture is typified as collectivism. In the collectivistic culture such as Chinese, individual is less valued than a perceived collective interest.

The third dimension within the value system is the perceived importance among various activities conducted by human beings. We label this dimension as the priority of activities. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) suggested three orientations: doing, thinking, and being. The doing orientation maintains that our natural and

Table 1. Comparison of American and Chinese Cultures

Cultural Dimensions	American (Western)	Chinese (Eastern)
Value System		
Relation to Natural World	Mastery	Harmony
Relation Among People	Individualism	Collectivism
Priority of Activities	Thinking and Doing	Being and Doing
Basis of Moral Standard	Reasoning	Feeling
Priority Along Time	Future Oriented	Present Oriented
Belief System		
Nature of Human Beings	Naturally Evil	Naturally Good
Religious Faith	External Superpower - God	No External Superpower
Nature of Knowledge	Objective, External	Subjective, Internal
Nature of Change	Linear Change	Cyclical Change
Motivation of Human Beings	Material	Spirit
Ideal & Destination	Developed Individuals	Harmonized Society

preferred mode of activity is to be continually engaged in accomplishing tangible tasks. The thinking orientation maintains that our natural and preferred mode of activity is to consider all things carefully and rationally before taking action. The being mode is to do everything in its own time. The Western culture places priority on thinking and then doing, while the Eastern culture emphasizes on being and doing.

The fourth value dimension is the basis of moral standard. As parts of the value system, the first three dimensions offer explicit and implicit standards for individual and group judgement, the fourth dimension suggests preferred ways of making a moral judgement. Wilson (1993) argues that there are four universal morals shared by all people: sympathy, fairness, self-control, and duty. The Western culture tends to use reasoning as a tool in making moral judgements (Kohlberg, 1969) and is concerned with different levels of judgement: good, right, and ought (Girvetz, 1973). Thus, the Western moral standard leans to fairness and duty while the Chinese culture tends to use sympathy and self-control as the moral standard.

The fifth dimension in the value system is the priority along time and it directs our main concerns and energy along the nature-time framework. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) list three orientations along this dimension: past, present, and future. The Western culture tends to be future oriented and the traditional Chinese culture emphasizes on present mode in decision-making process. Weber (1904/1930) asserted that time is money for the Protestants. Time orientation is somewhat related to religious beliefs. Weber contended that: "Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health. . . . is worthy of absolute moral condemnation. . . . [Time] is infinitely valuable because every hour lost is lost to labour for the glory of God. Thus inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work. For it is less pleasing to God than the active performance of His will in a calling" (1904/1930, pp. 157-158).

Belief System. Belief system is different from the value system because the former concerns the priority or importance while the latter assumes what is true in the world. The belief system is composed by those basic assertions about the natural world and human beings. These assertions are basic and fundamental hypotheses that cannot be easily proven to be true or false, and thus human beings have to accept such assertions. Human beings have to hold some basic beliefs as guidelines for their actions. Thus, the belief system also includes basic assumptions about the nature world and human beings. While the value system reflects the priorities of an individual and a group of individuals, the belief system contains views about the natural world and human being that cannot be easily tested. We think that at least six dimensions can be identified to examine cultural differences.

The first dimension of the belief system is the nature of human beings. The Western belief system was established on the assumption that the basic nature of people is essentially bad. This was probably due to the Christian influence that accepts human kind as a result of eating evil fruit. On the contrary, the Chinese belief about human beings tends to assume the basic nature of people is essentially good, or at least is changeable ("Ren Zi Chu, Xing Ben Shan", e.g., "Human is born with goodness" from Confucianism).

The second dimension of the belief system is related to the first one. One's religious faith is one of the fundamental keys to one's basic assumptions about the world. The Western culture seems to have a strong religious faith. The major religion in the Western world, Christianity, views God as single superpower external to human

beings. The traditional Chinese religion did not have such a belief about a single superpower. The Chinese word of god, "Shen", has multiple meaning rather than being attached to one superpower. "Shen" means god or divinity, it also means anything that is mysterious, marvelous, supernatural. In the Chinese literature of mythology, there are many gods that hold power over human being.

The third dimension of the belief system concerns the nature of knowledge. The Western culture has heavily leaned toward a rational tradition, which views knowledge as objective and that reality exist independently of mental representations of the world (Mazirow, 1996). Such a tradition also posits that logic and rationality are formal and that intellectual standards are not arbitrary. The Chinese view of knowledge is subjective and has an instrumental function. Different perspectives on the nature of knowledge are related to the views about reality. The objective perspective of knowledge might be a result of a view of a single reality, which is assumed to be created by a single superpower and to have consistent and lawful relationships among its elements. The subjective perspective of knowledge views multiple realities and implies an interpretive approach to the natural world (Roth & Yang, 1997).

The fourth dimension of the belief system is about the change of the natural world. Marshak (1994) contends that the Western OD approach is based certain beliefs and assumptions that view change as linear, progressive, destination or goal oriented, based on creating disequilibrium, and planned and managed by people who exist separate from and act on things to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the Eastern or Taoist model comprises beliefs and assumptions that change is cyclical, processional, journal oriented, based on maintaining equilibrium, and observed and followed by people who are one with everything and must act correctly to maintain harmony in the universe. Beliefs and assumptions about change are related to the belief dimensions discussed previously. The Western culture holds that there is a single best reality [created by the God] for humans to achieve in a forward way. The Eastern [particularly Taoist] culture assumes multiple realities and that there is no best or better mode of change. The Taoism emphasizes that there is a constant ebb and flow to the universe and everything in it is cyclical: "Tian Bu Bian, Tao Ye Bu Bian" (i.e., "The nature is not changing, and thus the Tao remains in constant").

The fifth dimension of the belief system relates to the inherent motivation of human beings. Based on the assumption that human beings are naturally evil, the Western culture presumes a materialistic motivation. The Eastern culture, however, maintains that the essence of human kind is in its spirit. In the case of conflict, people should pursue the spiritual direction rather than the material one. The Eastern culture recognizes that people might be seduced by the materialistic world and by selfishness, and it thus calls for self-control and cultivating. There is a Buddhist scripture that captures such a view: "Ku Hai Wu Bian, Hui Tou Shi An." (i.e., "The materialistic sea is endless, coming back [to be good one] can reach the shore"). In the combat world, Western soldiers are instructed to protect themselves while Chinese soldier are educated to "She Shen Qu Yi" (i.e., "sacrifice your body for justice and righteousness").

The sixth dimension of the belief system is concerned about the ideal destination of human beings. The Western culture emphasizes individual rights and freedom and views fully developed individuals as the ultimate goal. The Eastern culture places the harmony among human beings and the nature as the ultimate goal. Thus a harmonized society is viewed as much more important than an individual's right or growth in China. The Western culture seeks fully developed human potential with an active, individualistic approach.

Social Differences

Rohner (1984) defines a social system as the behavioral interactions of multiple individuals who exist within a culturally organized population. Society is a complex system and there are numerous aspects that can be examined. We have identified the most relevant aspects of society in examining the impacts on organizational behavior. Table 2 lists several aspects where the USA and China have dramatic differences. We included two cultural dimensions, power distance and tight versus loose (Earley, 1997) and renamed them as social structure and reinforcement of social norms. We place these dimensions in the category of social contexts because they belong to neither the value system or the belief system. In fact, these two dimensions are contained by the social norm system.

China. China is the world's largest third-world nation in terms of its economic development. China's population has exceeded 1.2 billion. Geographically, China is the world's fourth-largest country (after Russia, Canada, and US). China is also a country that has thousands of year history. For centuries China has stood as a leading civilization, outpacing the rest of the world in agriculture, technology, arts and sciences. China gradually became a semi-colonized country since the mid nineteenth century when it lost an opium war to the British Empire. Western imperialists forcibly opened China's trading doors by addicting a considerable portion of the population to opium. For almost a century, China suffered from famines, civil unrest, military defeats, and foreign occupation.

Table 2 Comparison of American and Chinese Societies

Social Dimensions	American	Chinese
Overall Social Context	Largest Industrialized Nation	Largest Third-World Nation
History	Hundreds of Years	Thousands of Years
Economy System	Free Market Capitalist Enterprise	From Central Planning to Free Market System
Technology	Sophisticated Manufacturing and Growing High-Tech	Majority of Workforce in Ag. Mix of High and Low Tech
Social Structure	Moderate Pyramid	Flat but Heightening
(Power Distance)	Moderate Distance	Low but Increasing Rapidly
Reinforcement of Social Norms	Loose	Tight but Beginning to Loosen

After World War II, the Communists under Mao Zedong established a new republic, ensured China's sovereignty, imposed the communist ideal of egalitarianism and great harmony. Under Mao's leadership, Chinese regained respect and dignity but economic development was stagnated. After 1978, Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping launched reforms and decentralized economic decision-making. Output quadrupled in the next 20 years and China now has the world's second largest GDP.

Beginning in late 1978 the Chinese leadership has been moving the economy from a sluggish Soviet-style centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented economy. The old collectivization in agriculture (i.e., commune structure) was replaced by a system of household responsibility, more decision-making power was given to local officials and plant managers in industry, and the government finally allowed a wide variety of private-owned enterprises. At the same time China opened to the Western countries and the "open door" policy has resulted in increasing foreign trade and investment. The reform is a successful one as it quadrupled GDP since 1978. In 1999, with its 1.25 billion people but a GDP of just \$3,800 per capita, China became the second largest economy in the world next to the USA. Agricultural output doubled in the 1980s, and industry also posted major gains. On the darker side, the social structure has been transformed from a flat system (egalitarian, stagnated, lassitude) to a vibrating hierarchy (bureaucracy, corruption, impetuous). Deng Xiaoping invented the term of "a socialist market economy" to describe his vision of China. One of the biggest challenges for his successors in next few years is to balance a highly centralized political system and an increasingly decentralized economic system. At the same time, the economic reform has opened a Pandora's box (e.g., individual interests that lead to selfish behaviors) that has caused a tremendous challenge. In sum, China is the largest industrializing country that has many problems to face that were preciously faced by many other developing countries.

The United States. Unlike China which has a long history filled with chaos and civil wars, the relative short history of the USA witnessed only two major traumatic experiences in the nation's history (Civil War and the Great Depression). Buoyed by victories in World Wars I and II and the end of the Cold War, the USA remains the world's most powerful nation-state. The economy is marked by steady growth, low unemployment and inflation, and rapid advances in technology. The USA has the most technologically powerful, diverse, advanced, and largest economy in the world, with a per capita GDP of \$33,900. In this market-oriented economy, the pyramid of social structure is moderately high and it loosely reinforces the social norms. Both political and economic systems allow private individuals and business firms to make most of the decisions. At the same time, government does not run business and it has to buy needed goods and services predominantly in the private marketplace. The USA is featured as a loose country in terms of its reinforcement of social norms. The American economy is characterized by increasing high-tech and service. American firms are at or near the forefront in most areas.

Comparison of Human Resource Theory and Practice

Managerial Philosophy

Table 3 summarizes the major differences between the Eastern and the Western approaches to management. The interactions among three cultural systems (value, belief and social norm) have resulted in different spiritual attachment in different social contexts. For the majority of Americans, the term "spirit" means the relationship with the God. Thus the featured spiritual life is standing aloof from worldly affairs in the American culture. On the contrary, the dominant spiritual idea in China is Confucius teaching: "Xiu Sheng, Qi Jia, Zi Guo, Ping Tian Xia" (i.e., "cultivate one's moral qualities, set up family, serve for the country, and work toward equality and harmonized world"). Consequently the Chinese view of spirit as it exists only in entering into worldly affairs.

As a result of interactions among values, beliefs, social contexts and spiritual attachment, American management theory and practice rely on technical rationality. Organizations are set up to maximize their earnings or profits. Organizations are established on an individual basis. Individual employees are hired and fired based on mutual will. The overall managerial strategy is characterized as a proactive approach, which requires positivistic means in problem solving (i.e., an empirical approach, a fact-finding process toward a positive direction). Decisions making is characterized as a rational process (i.e., linear, step-by-step, maximize outcome). It assumes that the problem is clear and unambiguous and that managers clearly know their options and preferences. Such management approach also emphasizes innovation and progression as viable means to reach the organizational mission (i.e., profit). System and structure have been placed heavy weights in management theory and practice. Thus, American management philosophy can be featured as technical rationality.

Table 3. Comparison of American and Chinese Managerial Philosophies

	American (Western)	Chinese (Eastern)
Spirit	Stand Aloof From Worldly Affairs	Enter Into Worldly Affairs
Organizational Value	Maximizing Profit	Benevolence and Righteousness
Organizational Form	Individual Basis	Family Basis
Managerial Strategy	Proactive	Reactive
Problem Solving	Positivistic Means	Naturalistic Means
Decision Making	Rational Decision	Muddling Through
Managerial Emphasis	System and Structure	Process and Practice (Human Side)
Preferred Method	Innovation and Progression	The Golden Mean (Confucianism)
Main Characteristic	Rely on Technical Rationality	Center on Social Morality

Viewing the world as chaotic and human beings as naturally good (or at least can be educated to be good), Chinese management philosophy takes a vastly different stand from the West. The Chinese culture impels individuals to enter into worldly affairs to find their spirit. Traditional private businesses are set up on a family basis with a managerial philosophy of benevolence and righteousness. Business is viewed as an instrumental entity to yield goods and service to fulfill its social responsibility. Chinese businesses tend to depend on networking closely related to family and lineage (Chi-Cheung, 1998). The overall managerial strategy is reactive (i.e., “Ying Bian”) or sometimes passive (“Wu Wei Er Zhi”, i.e., “manage by letting things take their own course”). Such managerial philosophy is consistent with the naturalistic/interpretive problem solving method. Decision-making process can be characterized as “muddling through.” One of Deng Xiaoping’s major reform theories is so called “Mo Zhe Shi Tou Guo He” (i.e., “grope for stones while passing the river”). Related to this problem solving style is the emphasis on the human side rather than the system side in management. Rules and regulations do not appear to be as important as human beings. Managers in a collectivistic culture prefer personal appeals and emotional strategies rather than rational decisions (Shane, 1994). Consequently organizational process and practice have received more attention than structure and system. The essence of the Chinese managerial approach can be found in the dated Confucianism classic “The Golden Mean.” This mean managerial method prefers to bring about equilibrium rather than to create disequilibrium. It requires balance not only between human beings and the environment but also among people in a community or society. The underlying force that drives such managerial philosophy is social morality that calls for organizational ethics and social responsibility. Zhang (1993) contends that “Yi Li Lian Quan” (i.e., “overall balance between justice and profit”) is the driving force for the enterprise competition in East Asian.

HR Theory and Practice

We listed the differences between American and Chinese HR practice in Table 4. We will try to compare the two countries in virtually all HR areas including the nature of employment, selection, compensation, promotion, and evaluation. We also have taken an HR outlook for the two countries in the following areas: HRD emphasis, goal, HR function in organization, and the main characteristic of HR practice.

The USA is a market-oriented capitalist country. Human resource practice has been determined by its cultural and social contexts. Moreover, HR practice has been integrated into its social and cultural systems and become part of social norm system. Most jobs in the USA are contracts based on will. That is, both employer and employee find their best fit to meet their mutual needs in a free job market. Employee selection is largely based on ability and competence. Employee compensation is established on the basis of work performance and contribution to his/her organization. Performance evaluation is conducted with quantifiable data in a scientific way. Human

resource development has been placed on training and development. The basic function of HR is to contribute to the overall organizational performance in terms of profit making and thus is viewed as one kind of capital (i.e., human capital).

Table 4. Comparison of American and Chinese HR Practice

	American (Western)	Chinese (Eastern)
Nature of Employment	Contract Based on Will	Long Term Employment
HR Selection	Ability/Competence	Morality/Social Connection
Compensation	Performance	Seniority
Promotion	Potential Development	Loyalty/Social Acceptance
Evaluation	Quantitative Method	Qualitative Method
HRD Emphasis	Training and Development	Management and Utilization
HR Function in Organization	Economic Outcomes	Social Outcomes
HR Goal	Fully Developed Individuals	Social Harmony
Main Characteristic	Rule by Law	Rule by Human Beings

The implicit goal of such HR practice is to fully develop individual potentials in a competitive job market. Overall, the US HR practice can be characterized as a rational approach and ruled by law.

Prior to the economic reform launched in 1978, the dominant management philosophy in China was one of economic egalitarianism. Such philosophy works toward a classless society and requires little difference between the salaries and compensation of managers and workers. Economic egalitarianism can be traced thousands years back to the Chinese history that is filled with corrupted old dynasties and new dynasties in turn. The new dynasties were normally brought by uprisings with certain egalitarian slogans (e.g., "Tian Xia Wei Gong", or "land under heaven belongs to all"). Throughout the long history of China, virtually every party and government emphasized the importance of morality and personal integrity. An appointment is made primarily on the basis of a person's morality or loyalty to the party in power. Leaders and managers were selected even though they are not necessarily technical competent. Such practice of HR utilization has been best summarized by an ancient Chinese politician and scholar, Shima Guang, in his famous annalistic-styled historic book "Zi Zhi Tong Jian." This book became a must-read for later rulers. Shima proposed a dialectic relationship between two key qualities of an individual: "De" (i.e., "morality") and "Cai" (i.e., "competence"). He posited that morality is the commander of competence which, in turn, provides a ride for the morality. He further classified all individuals into four types. The first type is called "Sheng Ren" (i.e., "wise person") who possesses both strong morality and talent. The second type of person is called "Xian Ren" (i.e., "person with virtue") who shows strong morality but probably less competence. The third type of person is named as "Xiao Ren" (i.e., "mean person" or "villain") who has certain ability but poor personal integrity. The fourth type of person is called "Yong Ren" (i.e., "mediocre person") who is low in both competence and morality. Shima suggested that the wise person should be the first choice in personnel utilization, followed by the person with virtue. When neither the wise person nor the virtue person is available, he maintained that the mediocre person should be selected rather than the villain because the mean person would work for his/her own interests rather than work for the community and society. Though being less competent, the mediocre person is better than the villain because of inability of doing harmful things to the organization/community/society. The key principle of Chinese HR is often called "De Cai Jian Bei" (i.e., "having both political integrity and competency").

Traditionally, employment in China is long-term, long enough to be life-long. Employee selection was based on morality and social connections, while personal competence was regarded as less important. In China, "Guanxi" (i.e., social connections) has been formalized as valid means of employment. Guanxi refers to a network of personal favors and obligations stemming from various social ties. Aufrecht and Bun (1995) observed that the lack of a free market for so many commodities makes Guanxi a particularly tricky obstacle to reform. Compensation was largely established on seniority rather than performance. Promotion was conducted on the basis of loyalty and social acceptance. Performance evaluation was largely qualitative nature and tended to be subjective. HRD emphasis was placed on management and utilization rather than training and development. Human resource is a new concept being introduced to China after reform. Most organizations do not have HR departments and they establish personnel departments to take care of all personnel related affairs (Lin, 1999). One of the major HR functions was to bring about desired social outcomes (e.g. no one should be unemployment) rather than economic outcome (e.g., profit and efficiency). Thus HR was supposed to function as a part of the broad social system working toward social harmony. Overall, HR practice can be characterized as being ruled by human beings (i.e., "Ren Zhi" or "Yi Ren Wei Ben").

Contributions to New Knowledge in HRD

The present study contributes to the knowledge base of HRD in a number of ways. First, the theoretical framework proposed in this paper provides a useful tool in a cross-cultural study in organizational behavior. Second, the comparison of HR theories and practice between the USA and China in this paper will provide adequate explanations and practical tools for the HR professional working in an international arena, particularly between the USA and China. Third, this paper provides a framework for scholars and HR professionals to reflect on their own values and belief systems in order to improve research and practice. Each culture has its fundamental values and beliefs and shows some unique norms. There is no judgement in our analysis in terms of which culture is superior or better. Each culture has successfully evolved hundreds or thousands of years in the civilization process and developed certain relations between the environment and among its members. However, these relations among the cultural factors are not static. Cross-cultural examinations help us to learn valuable elements from other cultures. Manager and other HR professionals can borrow some fresh ideas and effective practices from other cultures through cross-cultural study.

Conclusion

This paper proposed a theoretical framework of cross-cultural study in organizational behavior. It is posited that culture contains three major subsystems: values, beliefs and social norms. This framework is then used to compare American and Chinese HR theory and practice. Organizational behavior is included as part of a social norm system which, on a macro level, interacts with its value system and belief system. Content analysis revealed that Chinese managerial philosophy and HR practice are drastically different from the American one. Chinese managerial philosophy is featured as being centered on social morality, while American managerial philosophy is characterized as technical rationality. On one hand, different managerial philosophies attribute to different values, beliefs, thinking and doing styles, and a number of other social and cultural factors. On the other hand, different managerial philosophies have resulted in different HR theories and practices. Traditional Chinese HR practice is ruled by human beings while American HR practice tends to be ruled by law.

Care should be taken into account in generalizing the concepts and conclusions presented in this paper. What we have done was a comparison between traditional or normative modes of cultural and social dimensions between two countries. As a result of rapid social and technical changes and increasing international exchanges and communications, every culture is changing. For example, one might be able to find a strong individualist feature of organizational behaviors in these newly established regions of China due to privatization and rebellion of traditional ideology. For a large and complicated country like China, we need to examine several competing value systems. We should overcome a simplification that assumes a unitary and consistent culture for each country. Most countries are facing dramatic changes and experiencing cultural reconfigurations. We should examine cross-cultural and cross-national organizational behaviors in the light of dynamic relationships among cultural elements as proposed in this paper rather than view them as static.

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Enhancing Commitment and Overcoming the Knowing-Doing Gap: A Case Study at the Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG) in South Africa

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This case-study deals with the problem of overcoming the knowing –doing gap and increasing commitment in an action-research project. It is based upon a social constructionist framework and was conducted at TNG, a Tertiary Educational Institution in South Africa. After preparatory interviews, a Strategic Human Resource Management Conference brought all managers of the TNG together in a context where a set of 'process and context characteristics' were applied.

Keywords: Organizational Commitment, Knowledge Transfer, South Africa HRD

Pure knowledge about HRM and Organizational Change is rapidly increasing. But the application of this knowledge, or putting this knowledge into practice is difficult and doesn't seem to be able to keep up the pace. As academics we need a shared 'view' on and 'knowledge about 'process and context characteristics', based upon research. This case study wants to contribute to this need.

South Africa has undergone an enormous transformation process. Institutions for professional education such as The Technikon Northern Gauteng (TNG) play a major role in this process. TNG is a formerly disadvantaged Tertiary Educational Institution in South Africa¹. It mainly focuses on providing bachelor degree studies (3 year programs). The institution is situated in Soshanguve (a township near Pretoria), has six faculties, about 600 employees and about 8.500 students.

The Technikon, with its faculties of economics and management, education and commerce, can count on a lot of highly educated staff members that are skilled to solve problems and bring about changes. But these 'knowledgeable' people are not used to exchanging ideas, to decide in consultation on a common goal that all of them want to reach; they don't lack knowledge, but they fail to share it. On top of that, there is the division between the so-called 'powerful people', qualified to make decisions, and the labourers. Effective communication between both parties is often problematic. And thus problems occur that are difficult to solve: individuals alone can't make it happen. This is not a South African problem or a problem of a specific country. It is an organizational problem.

Problem statement

The TNG doesn't lack competent staff: they know a great deal about HRM and Organizational change, they are motivated and loyal to the institution they work for and certainly show commitment to the institution's goal, i.e. providing students with a decent professional training and education. But how can we make them put their knowledge into practice? How can we increase their ability to turn knowledge into action?

Theoretical framework

This action-research project focuses on overcoming the knowing-doing gap and on increasing commitment. It is based on a social constructionist view on organizations.

1. Research demonstrates that the success of most interventions designed to improve organizational performance depends largely on implementing what is already known, rather than from adopting new or previously unknown ways of doing things." (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Many successful interventions rely more on implementation of simple knowledge available within the organization than on creating new insights or discovering secret practices

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used by other firms. This means that *overcoming the gap between knowing and doing* is very important for an organization's performance. Although there are differences in knowledge across organizations, a much larger source of variation in performance stems from the ability to turn knowledge into action. If the employees learn from their own actions and behavior, then there won't be much of a knowing-doing gap because they will be "knowing" on the basis of their doing, and implementing that knowledge will be substantially easier (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

2. The key to quality and productivity, to obtain sustained, superior performance is *employee commitment*. This is especially true in services, e.g. in research and education, at universities and schools where the performance of the service-people at the key-moments of delivering is decisive. The four supports of commitment read as follow: (a) clarity about goals and values; (b) employee competencies that allow success; (c) the degree of influence that employees have; (d) the expressed appreciation given to employees for their contributions (Kinlaw, 1993).

(a) *Clarity about Goals and Values*. For commitment to a job an employee must have a focus. Focus is created by communicating the strategic *goals* and core *values* of the organization downward through *each level*. Supervisors and their subordinates have to have the same opinion over: the number-one purpose as a work group and what makes this purpose important and over the values that currently and ideally drive the work group's performance.

(b) *Employee Competencies that Allow Success*. People develop commitment toward what they believe they can do well. If managers want commitment, they must make sure that employees have the ability and willingness to be successful in their jobs. The most personal strategy for building competence is coaching.

(c) *The Degree of Influence that Employees have is the Third "Leg" of Commitment*. Employees do not perform nearly as well when they are consistently denied any input in their jobs and are expected to follow unquestionably the decisions of their leaders. There are three areas for influence innovation, planning and problem solving; and three kinds of influence within each area: inputting, deciding and implementing. Inputting means identifying problems, researching data, providing technical information and expertise. Decision making means participating in decisions about problem definition, about which problems will be addressed, etc.; Implementing means designing solutions, undertaking and evaluating strategies, etc. Coaching is the key for extending the influence of employees. In their coaching conversations with employees, managers permit employees actively to identify their own needs and to help shape the ways these needs are met.

(d) *The Expressed Appreciation Given to Employees for their Contributions*. People work best when they believe that what they do matters to someone else - especially their bosses. Of course, there is need to recognize superior performance. But one needs to recognize more than performance. Employees often feel more appreciated for having their pain recognized than for having their performance recognized. Of course appreciation can also be something creative or even outrageous or can be deliberately made in public (Kinlaw, 1993).

3. We chose to study an organization from a *social constructionist* angle (Wieck, 1995; Gergen, 1994,1996) and to see an organization as the result of ongoing negotiations between all the parties involved in the organization. The creation and sharing of 'meaning' is the basic process of organization. This means that an organization is seen as a co-creation, as something in a constant state of becoming. In social constructionism organization diagnosis and organization intervention are closely linked. Working on a diagnosis and seeking joint visions implies a constant construction and deconstruction of shared 'meaning'. We therefore deliberately avoid scientific research that studies an organization as an "object" from an exogenous perspective. We consciously choose to do action research (see methodology).

This is the framework of our research: an action-research project, based on a social constructionist view on organizations and directed towards overcoming the knowing-doing gap and towards an increase in commitment to work towards solutions.

In previous action research about Optimization of personnel management in the Belgian Tax Administration, situated within the same theoretical framework (Martens,1997; Martens & Corthouts 1997 & 1998), we formulated the following *process and context characteristics that were helpful to overcome the knowing-doing gap and increase commitment of employees to act on solutions*.

1.Introduction and support of top management and authorisation by the hierarchy.

2.Take viewpoints, opinions, ideas, perceptions, limitations and objections of the other party or parties seriously; unconditionally, genuinely and consistently with an appreciative attitude.

3.Propose or introduce a long-term principle of co-operation. Look for a jumping-off point, a common value or goal of real interest to all parties, as this will have a positive effect on every participant. Seek for a win-win relationship between organization and individuals as well as between researchers and clients by establishing contact and by discussing the aims of the research, their contribution, the further processing and the expected output.

4.Reaching joint agreement on the directions and the operational procedures to be taken in each step. Every time a next step needs to be taken in , careful consideration of all parties is required. The next step is not taken

unless all parties consider it meaningful and take up their responsibility for it. The end result of each step is jointly evaluated, before moving on to another stage.

5. Openness in communication. Encourage people to be honest with each other and to say what is really on their minds. Parties should encourage each other to be equally frank and forthright. In this way, an open atmosphere is created: there is plenty of space for questions, discussions and individual opinions (trying to use model -2 behavior of Argyris, 1990)

6. Reframing information, creating openings to view things from different angles. For example, by appreciating different opinions yielding different views on reality (see 1) and by "experiencing" that there is no such thing as THE ONE objective reality, participants learn that many subjective perceptions of different individuals should be considered contextual data which need to be taken into account

7. Gradual recognition of the role of external facilitators, action-researchers and valid conversation partners. These 'process and context characteristics' do not assure success. Neither can we provide you with practical instructions for using them. But we will investigate whether they are clear enough to act as goals and guiding principles in the interaction process with our client. In order to do so, we will act '...as an active agent within the organizations themselves, serving for example, as consultant, organizational participant, board member or evaluator.' (Gergen, 1996, p.372) And further: 'the postmodernist view offers an alternative vision of organization science, one that places a major emphasis on processes of social construction, that emphasizes continuing interchange, continuing reflection and transformation. (Gergen, 1996, p.374).

We will further investigate and improve these 'process and context characteristics' in this TNG-project.

Research questions or propositions

This case-study concentrates on overcoming the knowing -doing gap and increasing commitment in an action-research project based upon a social constructionist framework.

If we, researchers and clients constantly try to realize the above formulated 'context and process characteristics' in this project, is it then possible to overcome the knowing-doing gap and to increase commitment? Or do we need other conditions? Which ones?

Methodology and/or research design

We explain our preference for action research, the situation of HRM at TNG, our proposal: a HRM-conference for all managers, with preparatory interviews and a debriefing at the rectorate, the results of the conference.

Action research

The desired output of *action research* consists of solutions to actual problems on the one hand, and of making a contribution to scientific knowledge and theory on the other (French and Bell, 1995). This is research with the objective of steering present and future action from the inside, and with the typical co-operation between individuals working within the system (referred to as "clients") and individuals outside the system (referred to as "researchers"). We regard this action component, working alongside with TNG-employees and the implementation of research results, as a particular mission and challenge. This action-research research strategy implies an iterative process of purposeful data-collection, feedback to the client group, discussion of data, action planning, action and evaluation. The perceptions yielded by this cyclical process are continuously the subject of implementation and testing. This increases the validity of the generated knowledge in the context of the professional university sector. This process of collectively negotiate the new way of organizing is the most decisive within the learning process. (Swieringa 1990). In this way we involve people in research and action so that the organization benefits from its inside knowledge and skills, and, what's even more important, that people are motivated to help each other out. By choosing action-research, we opt for a win-win operation between TNG and research. We opt for co-operation between researcher and clients and work in close contact with top-management of the TNG.

The situation of HRM at TNG

In the past 5 years quite a few things have changed at the TNG, with some remarkable changes in HRM at TNG: structural changes were brought about, the personnel policy has been revised and a lot of co-workers changed. A lot of improvement plans were devised, some of these were worked out in close contact with key persons, others were made without consulting. Few of these plans have been implemented so far. Key persons have the feeling that

they have to discuss problems concerning their daily working situation over and over again, and they *do* think about solutions to these problems; but they feel that few things really change. Many of these 'daily' problems affect more than one department and people of different departments reproach one another. HR tasks and responsibilities aren't divided up clearly between HR department and line-management, managers are complaining about the services of the HR department, reproaches are made towards one another. As a result, there sometimes isn't any staff to teach classes... HR-policies and procedures are not in place, some are outdated, disputed, unknown, confusing and sometimes even ignored and there aren't any plans on paper. The problem with situations such as this one is that matters are usually dealt with on an ad hoc basis: Line-managers tend to go their own way and solve HR issues in a way that (sometimes) suit them best; meanwhile the HR people continue to fight their own uphill battle. Next to a general feeling of discontent and discomfort on both sides and a strong need to improve the current situation, individuals and groups feel they don't have enough power to bring about changes.

One of the HR-experts has completed several missions since 1997 and has built up very good relations with academic and administrative managers on different levels, as well as with the people of the HR-department. Together they put together an "Introduction Booklet" for new staff members (1997) and organized several training sessions dealing with basics in HRM and project management for managers in general and for Personnel Officers. He also did quite a lot of personal coaching for new Personnel Officers. However, due to a high turnover rate in the Personnel Department and the lack of a HRM Director, it sometimes seems to be an uphill battle.

Our proposal

From December 1999 onwards, both HR-experts worked on a proposal containing 'context and process characteristics' that would help achieve their goal, i.e. overcoming the knowing-doing gap and increasing the employees' commitment. This is important to finalize a sound HRM together with the local staff. The experts discussed their proposal with the local co-ordinator in December 1999.

In order to create a context in which managers could share knowledge and learn from their own actions we would like - to unite academic and administrative managers of different levels and the top management or rectorate

- to discuss and analyze the problems with the whole group and to focus on solutions rather than reproaches.
- to motivate every individual to deal with those aspects of problems and solutions that he or she can handle because he or she is able to take that responsibility
- to be clear about expectations, roles and contributions in the client – supplier relationships between different departments and services.
- for the rectorate to commit to and support the commonly agreed upon solutions and provide the resources needed to implement these solutions. If it is impossible for them to provide these resources, they should explain why.
- to do all this in a very effective and efficient way in order to create a feeling of acceptance in the in and between groups of participants. We want them to be proud with the outcome and stimulate them to proceed and keep up the good work.

With this in mind a Strategic Human Resource Management Conference was held on February 16th-17th 2000, which was open to all managers of the TNG. Before the conference took place, the two HR-experts sat together with the rectorate and with the participants (divided in small groups of 2-6 persons) to discuss and negotiate the purpose and the roles of all parties.

The following *objectives* were discussed and negotiated with all participants before *the conference* took place: (1) Develop written and broadly accepted strategic plans for the near future; (2) To work together as a HR department and line management and to learn more about where we are standing now and what direction we want to take; (3) Develop shared perceptions on present and future HRM.

These proposals and objectives are the vehicles to realize the 'process and context characteristics' helpful to overcome the knowing-doing gap and to increase the employees' commitment. In line with this action research study, we first talk with each group separately to analyze their current situation and compare it with their ideal situation, to discuss their own expectations and those of their superiors, and to think about a plan of action to move closer to this ideal situation. We organized this process within each group before the conference in preparatory interviews and between all groups during the conference.

The preparatory interviews

The conference was preceded by a number of interview-rounds for the different groups of managers. The rectorate, the deans, heads of the departments, directors of administration and supporting services were all involved

in these sessions. We invited all managers before the conference and hoped to talk to an as large and representative group as possible. 60 out of 71 managers came to the interviews. We talked with them in groups of 2-6 persons for approximately 1,5 hours. In these preparatory interviews 'the process and context characteristics' mentioned above were our guiding principles.

We always started with a short introduction to discuss the purpose of the conference. Then we asked everyone about their experiences, expectations and concerns and what the outcome of this conference would or could be. We went on explaining that, to us, HRM covers the HR activities of the HR department as well as those of the line management. Then we showed them the conference schedule and explained the methodological specificity. We put a lot of stress on the fact that we expected them to contribute and made it very clear that we would just take up the role of facilitator. In these interviews with *almost all academic and administrative managers*, we commonly investigated and discussed their problems and frustrations. We brought various kinds of expectations together and made them more realistic. Finally we discussed their roles and responsibilities, and worked on motivation and trust. We handed out schedules with the purpose of the program and the two days procedure. Each interview round was closed with the following questions: Are you willing to commit yourself to solving the existing problems? Are you willing to contribute during the conference? Are you willing to continue to work on improvements after the conference? Some participants were truly enthusiastic, others had their doubts. These doubts were taken seriously. But in most cases, we succeeded in breaking their barriers after a lengthy discussion. However, three individuals (all three of them belonging to different groups) remained uncertain.

In our first interview with the *top management* we talked about a number of things: first of all, we indicated that if problems occur, they can be solved or at least controlled by the management team in 80% of the cases. We also asked whether they would be prepared to support the results of the conference and whether they would take necessary measures, even drastic ones. We also asked them to open the conference, to express their expectations and to show their commitment. They promised to do their best to support the conference and its results.

The conference

The rector opened the conference and pointed out the importance of finding sensible solutions to many of the HRM-problems, so that TNG would be able to fulfil her mission in a better way. Then we started with the results of the interviews, as summarized above. We proposed to work together towards a solution to the problems discussed and to stop reproaching one another and to work according to our 'process and context characteristics'. We pursued a participatory approach. Ideas, perceptions and interpretations were prioritized and evaluated in a sequence of sessions during the two days of the conference. These sessions dealt with: (a) the trends or developments that affect HRM of TNG, (b) the stakeholders and their interests, (c) the purposes of HRM, (d) 4 steps of the SWOT-analysis and finally (e) the strategic action plans.

In order to assure an ordered course of events (i.e. inventory and prioritization), the participants were split up in heterogeneous groups of 6-8 persons, each sitting at a table. In each session everyone was asked to write down his/her own opinion on separate sheets of paper. E.g. what do you consider the most important trends or developments that are coming up and that will affect Technikon's HRM policy? Then, participants exchanged answers and opinions and voted on their importance. In this way, a ranking of topics that deserved priority was obtained. These were gathered on a central table and after an explanation by each table-leader, participants were asked to vote once more. In this way we came to a group decision in each session. This decision consisted of the prioritized answers of the entire group. All this was done in accordance with a relatively tight plan.

So we started with a *first session*: the identification of trends that influence the HRM at the TNG. In a *second session*, the stakeholders of TNG were stated. Because there was a large diffusion as to what the field of HRM operations is and what the borderlines are between the work of HR department and the HR work of the managers, we decided to give a *short lecture on the HR models* of Tichy (1984) and Beer (1985), the expected results of a good HRM and different possibilities to divide the HR-work between the human resources department and the line-managers. We thought that this short theoretical lecture would mean more to the participants than an unclear participatory discussion. In the third session the objectives for human resources at TNG were discussed and formulated. Then the interactive *SWOT-analysis* followed. This took us almost half a day.

Then the most important part of the conference, the *development of strategic plans*, began. We started off by forming four voluntary workgroups, all of them working on different issues: a first one on human resources policies; a second on a human resources manual; a third on staff training and development and a fourth on the clarification of the division of responsibilities and work between the human resources department and the managers. Each group got an assignment that was designed to work towards solutions to the formulated problems. Every assignment consisted of defining objectives, activities and a timeframe.

Making these assignments had a positive effect on the energy level of the participants. Many participants explicitly mentioned that they were making progress. Especially the presence of important decision makers gave them the feeling that problems could be discussed and that improvements could be made. The four groups worked on very differentiated, well-equilibrated and realistic assignments. When the results of the four assignments were presented, volunteers were encouraged to actually carry out the proposed work. Each group or 'taskforce' elected a chairperson and was placed under the mentorship of a dean.

At the very end of the conference, one of the black managers asked us the parole to initiate a short prayer of thanks and so the conference ended unforeseen in a very authentic and impressive way.

When they left the conference, participants pointed out that just at the end nobody of the rectorate was there anymore. But a debriefing was planned and one of the HR-experts was willing to personally follow up the results after the conference. He also promised to discuss potential problems with the rectorate. This meant a lot to the participants.

The debriefing at the rectorate

So, during the next day's debriefing at the rectorate, we asked one member of the rectorate to act as a godfather for the four taskforces and to pay attention to the links between the four task forces. We also asked them to take action, to provide the necessary professional staff at the human resources department in order to solve the most serious problems (e.g. no lecturers to teach as a result of delays). We wanted our two-day workshop to be inspiring and motivating: if the participants have a positive short-term experience, it stimulates them to keep developing and improving.

Results and findings

On the one hand, there are the results useful to TNG in particular; on the other hand there are the scientific findings about process and context factors to overcome the knowing-doing gap and increase commitment.

Results of the conference for TNG

We designed the intervention in such a way that the objectives of the conference could be met. Looking back on the objectives we see that: (1) TNG has written and accepted strategic plans for the near future now; (2) we worked and learned together as a HR department and linemenagers and (3) we also think we have contributed to the development of shared perceptions on human resources at least at the level of the existing problems and what has to be done about it in the near future.

First there are the four project groups with specific strategic plans for HRM: (1) for human resources policies, (2) for a human resources manual, (3) for staff training and development and (4) for the division of responsibilities and work between the human resources department and the managers. The four groups work on a very differentiated, well-equilibrated and realistic assignment, that consists of objectives, activities and a timeframe; volunteers carry out the proposed work; a chairperson for is elected for each group and is placed under the mentorship of a dean. One member of the rectorate will act as a 'godfather' for the four taskforces and pay attention to the links between the four taskforces. Participants, rectorate and we as HR-experts thought of it as high-quality assignments. And they were commonly negotiated and agreed upon! In this way the knowledge available in the organization was brought together to solve the problems.

Secondly there is *the process result* of sitting two days together in multi-functional groups of people who are in supplier-client relations. Participants have been encouraged to work together in diverse groups: young and old, black and white, academic and administrative, men and women, different religions etc. and they told us during and after the conference that they had learned to appreciate each other more than before. These two days of formal and informal talks and conversation *increased the quality of the communication and interaction* between the different groups at the TNG, they reported.

Thirdly there are *the negotiated and 'shared' intermediate results of the conference* dealing with (a) the trends or developments that affect HRM of TNG, (b) the stakeholders and their interests, (c) the objectives for HRM at TNG, and especially (d) the SWOT-analysis of HRM at TNG. The consciousness between the participants of having an agreement on these questions can be a good starting point for further actions and are indeed the topics of the workgroups. We made sure that every participant got a full conference report within one week after the conference.

In the official evaluation of the whole IPD-project in October 2000, IMEconsult (2000) writes about our action research "... a lot of people have been involved in the workshop and this has resulted in encouraging debates about managerial issues. A start has been made with developing strategic plans and objectives. The attitude (of the HR-Department) has changed from being a closed Kingdom into a more service-oriented department. People were offered a lot of opportunities to contribute to organizational development." But also: "There still is a variety of opinions on what HR should do and what the responsibility division between management at all levels and HR department should be like." And: "There still is "a focus on individuals instead of systems or mechanism."

Overcoming the knowing-doing gap and increasing commitment

In order to overcome the knowing-doing gap and to increase commitment, we organized a strategic HRM-conference at TNG as an action-research project. The different steps of the iterative process of purposeful data-collection, feedback to the client group, discussion of data and action planning interacted constantly. Participants gave feedback throughout the conference and adjustments were made on the spot whenever necessary. The data-collection, and the process of learning to discuss problems and deal with them as a group were very important. In preparatory interviews we invited all managers to make a joint diagnosis and eventually to propose solutions; we put heavy emphasis on the 'process and context characteristics' that we continually tried to realize and to safeguard. These interviews with the participants just before the conference, turned out to be very valuable, not only as a means of preparation, but also to establish the 'context and process characteristics' and to obtain insight in the current problems and feelings.

All these different diagnoses formed the starting point for the conference. We stressed that all different viewpoints would be taken seriously. The rector opened the conference by explaining the common goal that nearly all participants had personally and fully agreed upon during the interviews. The common goal and the first steps to be taken were truly based on a shared view. During the whole of the conference we tried to stimulate open and effective communication, the reframing of information, the creation of openings for viewing things from different angles, e.g. by having individuals write down their personal opinions first, and then list them and make up a ranking in group. The conference was an inviting and safe context, they told us, to work together and to exchange ideas, diagnoses, expectations, frustrations and possible ways to improve things. People reported that they had seldom communicated with each other so deeply on these TNG-topics. Within TNG we stimulated to work on the general need to improve things and to do it together. During the conference personnel officers and managers from the rank and file worked together on a plan for strategic improvements. Working together towards a common goal in a new setting, in a safe context seemed to be a very good way to stimulate commitment, mutual respect and understanding. The conference was organized by outsiders, who were increasingly recognized as facilitators and valid conversation partners. This was obtained by continually stimulating the use of 'the process and context characteristics', by addressing people in their own languages, e.g. by referring to activities and forms in the abbreviations and the code names used by the TNG and if necessary, by proposing and explaining frameworks and concepts that the client can use and adapt to its own situation and then demonstrate their added value.

The seven above-mentioned 'process and context characteristics' were gradually proposed and realized and were clear for the participants. These 'process and context characteristics' should not be considered accurate prescriptions of activities or cause result-relationships but they were clear enough for these managers to use as guiding principles in interactions.

Besides these 7 factors, the following aspects were often mentioned as being 'helpful'. During the conference the managers worked together in *cross-functional groups*, all together in the *same room and at the same moment*, towards the only truly important thing: the better functioning of HRM of TNG. This created a lot of positive energy; they almost 'forgot' about their own frustrations and put aside their prejudice against other individuals or groups. The immediate presence of important decision makers made it possible to view problems from different angles and in all aspects. All participants brainstormed together about ways to overcome the existing organizational barriers caused by the strict division of labor. These factors "working with cross-functional groups, all together, at the same moment and in the same place" was reported over and over again as very valuable. This phenomenon has already been described by Weisbord as: "The search conference or getting the whole system in the room, links values and action in real time. It promotes productive workplaces by using more of each persons reality" (Weisbord, 1987, p. 295)

Conclusions and recommendations

This study is a snapshot of TNG in a continuing, an ongoing organizational change process. If one looks back at 'the process and context factors' we tried to install, one might consider them as rather basic recommendations, as common sense: (1) Introduction and support of top management (2) Taking the viewpoints of other parties seriously (3) Looking for a common value or goal of real interest to all parties (4) Reaching joint agreement on the directions and the operational procedures to be taken in the next step (5) Openness in communication. (6) Reframing information, creating openings for viewing things from different angles. (7) Gradual recognition of the role of external facilitators, action-researchers and valid conversation partners and (8) working with cross-functional groups all together, at the same moment and in the same place. But this doesn't mean that these recommendations are common practice! Quite a few projects that were going on at TNG created frustrations and got stuck, possibly because the above-mentioned process characteristics were not applied....

How this research contributes to new knowledge in HRD

The conclusions may not seem to be very innovative at first sight. It is astonishing that a contribution to scientific knowledge can lay in the search of means and methods needed to put scientific knowledge into practice. Maybe we need to do more research and refine these 'context and process characteristics' or maybe find other forms to overcome the knowing doing-gap. Indeed, by studying and doing research we gain knowledge. But gaining knowledge is not the problem, it's the 'doing' part that causes problems. It is also striking that the problems we worked on are also familiar to our own university as well as other universities and organizations. HRD-academics need the courage to be unconventional en need to be convinced that research on overcoming knowing-doing gaps is not an inferior branch of research. On the contrary, it's necessary and very useful indeed!

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¹ Note: This research is situated in the IPD project (Improvement Personnel Department) within the context of MHO projects, in a Dutch Bilateral development co-operation, between Nuffic (with Jan Verhagen) and TNG.

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